

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 264 742

FL 015 440

AUTHOR Peters, Pamela
TITLE Writing Across the Curriculum in Australia.
PUB DATE [85]
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Design; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Instructional Improvement; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Language Proficiency; *Language Role; Program Descriptions; *Writing Instruction

IDENTIFIERS *Australia; *Language across the Curriculum

ABSTRACT

Discussions about the value of language-across-the-curriculum policy are often clouded by confusion over two different underlying principles or motives for its implementation: that it stimulates and enhances learning and that it consolidates the teaching and learning of writing in a variety of subject contents. In practice, it is the second principle that requires closer attention for successful implementation. There are fewer problems at the elementary level, where the overall objectives of instruction are longitudinal. Problems increase at the secondary level, where there is no general language curriculum serving as a reference syllabus for all subjects. There are also problems at the postsecondary level, where in Australia there is no general freshman writing course. The New South Wales Department of Education has developed a K-12 program in writing across the curriculum to consolidate and develop writing practices begun in the early years of schooling. The approaches at the elementary and secondary levels are different. On the elementary school level, the approach integrates language into the common curriculum. On the secondary level, it works toward teacher consensus and coordinated syllabi in the individual, decentralized public and private secondary schools. On the postsecondary level, Macquarie University has established an interdisciplinary committee on writing standards with some power to recommend helpful measures to the faculty senate. (MSE)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM IN AUSTRALIA

by

Pamela Peters

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Pamela Peters

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

☒ The document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

Introduction

For most educators, a writing-across-the-curriculum policy recommends itself for two kinds of reasons:

- I) it stimulates and enhances the process of learning, and
II) it consolidates the teaching and learning of writing in a variety of subject contexts.

Both are desirable aspects of the policy, though they represent different sets of priorities. According to the first principle, writing is a means to better learning in individual subjects. According to the second, the curriculum at large becomes the means through which writing skills can be learned. In each case one thing is the means to the other, but which is means and which is end is the opposite. Discussions about the value of writing-across-the-curriculum are often clouded by confusion over these two different underlying principles or motives for establishing such a policy, and one of my purposes in this paper is to make a clear separation between them. This indeed is the object of the first section, titled Principles. In practice, however, the second of those principles is the one which seems to need closer attention to be successfully achieved. I shall therefore be spending a good deal more time on it in the second section of the paper, titled Practicalities of Implementation, examining the issues which it raises at primary, secondary and tertiary level in turn. In the third and last section I shall describe some particular Initiatives towards writing-across-the-curriculum which have been undertaken in my home state, New South Wales, and there again, the problems associated with realizing the second principle will be to the fore.

Principles.

I) Probably the most fundamental and far-reaching reason for endorsing a writing-across-the-curriculum policy is the notion that it is a powerful tool and means of learning. This notion of course builds upon the general notion of language being at the core of the learning process, the means by which children grapple cognitively with both the formal and informal information presented to them in their environment. It is the means through which they articulate (in both senses of the word) newly acquired knowledge. Through language they both identify the joints or links between things, and express their understanding of them. Language is the means by which intuitive knowledge is brought to the surface and used.

This general role of language, described by Sir Alan Bullock in A Language for Life (1975) was of course also specifically associated with written language in Chapter 11 of the report. But it is James Britton, actually a member of Bullock's inquiry

ED264742

FL015 HAW

team, who put the spotlight on the role of written language in The Development of Writing Abilities 11 - 18 (1975), and his colleague Nancy Martin, with her Writing and Learning across the Curriculum 11-16 (1976). These two publications have exercised a strong influence on the thinking of teachers about the purpose and value of writing in education, both within the secondary school (to which their work applies most directly), as well as at primary and tertiary level. Though writing has traditionally been seen as vehicle for recording what has already been learned, witness its very extensive use as a testing instrument, Britton and Martin were able to show its importance as a way of discovering knowledge and making sense of new information. The comments of students interviewed by them amply corroborate the point:

"Writing, like talking, helps you to understand."

"It clears my mind to some extent what my view in whatever the subject is." (sic)

"Writing helps me know what I think."

Apart from helping students to assimilate new knowledge, and to establish their own position in relation to it, writing is important as a tool for exploring ideas and developing thought. It is a means of turning flashes of insight into a coherent perspective on something. It promotes much more sustained and complex thinking that is possible through talk. It must therefore be recognized as a major intellectual instrument, one whose importance increases as students move higher in the education system. The value of writing for tertiary students is being discussed more and more in these terms in the American journals on writing and composition. Janet Emig's article on "Writing as a mode of learning" (1977) is the seminal paper, and she and others after her such as Lee Odell and Cy Knoblauch, all emphasize the heuristic value of writing, its helpfulness to the more advanced students in articulating and exploring academic questions. So far there has been no full scale study of the uses of writing by tertiary students to match the work of Britton and Martin in the secondary school. But the composition teachers I met recently while visiting writing programs in the U.S.A. all seemed to draw inspiration and theoretical justification for their work from Britton and Martin. Case studies of individual American students are often used to corroborate the principle that writing is a significant means of learning at tertiary level too.

II) The second principle associated with writing-across-the-curriculum is, as we have noted above, the idea that the curriculum at large provides a useful range of contexts in which writing can be learned and taught. According to this principle we are interested in writing for its own sake - not as a service tool, but as a skill which needs to be cultivated and developed through the whole process of education. The ability to use writing to express oneself "accurately, confidently, appropriately" is one of the aims of a secondary

school education (Bullock, p.178); and we would certainly expect university graduates to be equipped with sophisticated writing skills, enabling them to communicate effectively with colleagues and superiors in whatever job they find themselves.

Although the acquisition of these skills takes place progressively through each level of education, the later stages of writing development are only beginning to be understood and talked about. At the primary level the emphasis has traditionally been on matters of correct grammar and usage and spelling (ie. correctness of the written form), but it has more recently altered to give more stimulus to the content of children's writing. Children are encouraged to write imaginatively and dramatically, without too much attention to correctness, for fear that it may inhibit their will to write at all. The de-emphasizing of matters of correctness at primary school has meant that such things often remain to be taught at secondary and even tertiary level these days. A knowledge of the "mechanics" of writing can certainly be acquired through writing in any subject, and students benefit by being reminded of the details in assignments everywhere.

But there are aspects of writing which benefit much more obviously from being taught and learned in a variety of subjects. To be able to write flexibly and appropriately, students need the experience of writing for all sorts of different purposes and all sorts of subject matter. The various subjects of the curriculum do provide a rich range of topics for any student to write about, and ideally the imaginative or abstract writing of an English class is balanced by informative and referential writing in science or geography. The various subjects should thus bring forth different purposes in writing, some of them exploratory and argumentative, and some geared to accurate observation and description (ie. a variety of transactional writing). Britton and others also stress the importance of expressive writing, that in which the writer's own experience of learning is to be freely communicated, which they feel is pivotal in both the learning and the writing process. Students gain by being able to write this way in any subject, they argue. They also argue that students should write for a variety of audiences, meaning not just different subject teachers, but different kinds of audience, ie. their fellow students or adults in the outside community, members of parliament, visitors to the country, etc., not just the all-too-common teacher or examiner. More such alternative audiences can be found if opportunities to write are exploited in every subject. And if writing is consciously practised year by year in all subjects, a depth as well as breadth of writing experience for each student should be assured.

In summary, the principle of teaching writing skills across the curriculum should ensure that students' experience of writing is:

- 1) lateralized (spread over multiple contexts)
- 2) longitudinalized (continued year by year)
- 3) personalized (linked with personal experience of learning).

These three aspects of writing development are the ones I particularly want to examine in the successive stages of education, and though I regret their cumbersome labels, they will serve their purpose when I return to them in later discussion. In fact the three do not remain equally important as students progress through the education system, as I now hope to show.

Practicalities of Implementation

At primary level.

Implementing a writing-across-the-curriculum policy seems to present fewer problems at the primary (infants/primary) level than any other. The overall aims of teaching there are very much longitudinal - promoting mental growth, developing children's skills in handling language and computation, and arousing their interest in the world around. Teachers are encouraged to monitor the children's progress week by week, month by month, year by year, and language development is closely watched.

Language arts are a bulky core element in the primary curriculum in Australia, and with both receptive and productive skills to be covered, they probably get the largest total amount of class time each day. Reading and writing require more formal attention than speaking or listening, but this is not a problem when all can be studied and practised for their own sake and not as a means to something else. When concentrating on writing, primary teachers need never feel they are "pinching" time or diverting attention from "the subject itself", as many do at higher levels of education. Writing can be taught systematically with its own priorities (whether they are seen in terms of mechanics, or engagement in the "writing process"). Provided the approaches in the same school are co-ordinated, the children's writing has every chance of showing continuous longitudinal development.

Lateralization of the children's writing experience is also relatively easy to achieve in primary schools, because the same teacher takes a class for all subjects (both language arts and arithmetic, as well as social studies, art, craft, and often physical and musical education too). When all are under their jurisdiction, they are treading on no-one's toes if they introduce writing into any of them, and they can integrate writing and writing exercises wherever they see fit. An excursion to the museum and a recent sports day provide equally good stimuli for writing, and the children are free to write in whatever form (report, description, narrative) they prefer. In principle they can get a wide range of writing experience.

The hoped-for variety of written forms is not necessarily achieved, however, according to the current study of Jim Martin conducted at a number of Sydney primary schools. He found (ms.

p.50) that in samples of free writing taken from good, average and poor students in grades 1 to 6, approximately 85% were narrative-expressive writing, and other "factual" types of writing (eg. reports, explanations, accounts of procedures) were only occasionally produced. Some teachers apparently encourage their children to write narratives ("write a story about..."), believing that it is an easier form of writing. Like expressive writing, it allows children to put themselves at the centre of their writing world. Other teachers seem to particularly value narrative writing, because of its imaginative and creative aspects, and treat factual writing as somehow an inferior product. Whatever the reason, the heavy preference for narrative-expressive forms is unfortunate, Martin argues, because primary children are getting so little experience of the factual (transactional) types of writing which are so important for success at secondary school. Britton's view of this would presumably be almost diametrically opposed: that so much expressive and personalized writing is ideal as a basis from which to develop transactional forms of writing.

However we judge it, primary school children's writing experience is highly personalized, and this aspect is reinforced where teachers espouse the so-called "process" approach to writing. This of course involves working with children over all the stages of composition: talking through ideas and "conferencing" with the children over their first jottings and fuller drafts. The approach is designed to make children much more conscious of being writers, and how they put thoughts down on paper, on the assumption that this is the way to establish their autonomy as writers. Unfortunately, the amount of time required for "conferencing" with every child is large and difficult to timetable, even with a medium-sized class, and they may not all experience the personalization of writing in this sense.

Yet personalization in the sense of frequent expressive writing is part of the writing experience of most primary school children. Longitudinal development of their writing is built into the curriculum, and their writing experience is readily lateralized through integration with the full range of subjects across the curriculum. All three aspects of our second principle are fulfilled, being perfectly compatible with teaching priorities at the primary school.

At secondary level

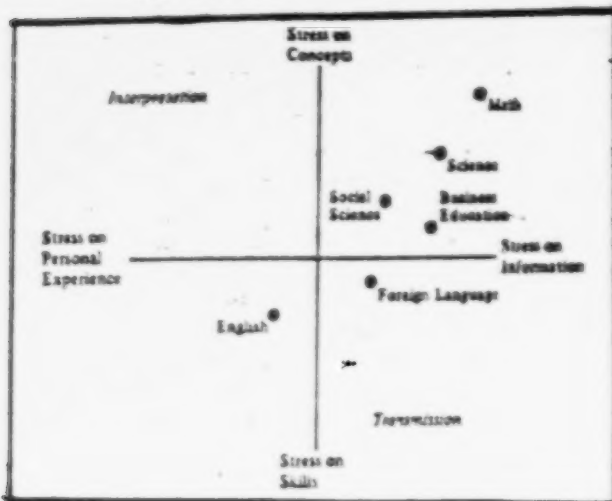
The practical problems of implementing a writing-across-the-curriculum policy in secondary schools are much more numerous. It is true that teachers there are, as in the primary school, oriented towards longitudinal development of academic skills. But there is no general language curriculum which serves as a reference syllabus for all subjects, and language skills have no particular place, except in the English syllabus, so that they seem to be the special responsibility of

the English teacher. But many English teachers regard their commitment to the subject as a matter of interesting their students in literature, rather than developing language skills. Their concerns as far as writing goes are more with imaginative and expressive writing than with practice of the transactional forms which would directly help their students in other subjects as well. The guidance offered on writing can be disturbingly ad hoc, and longitudinal development of skills can hardly be guaranteed. The attitudes of English teachers towards a writing-across-the-curriculum policy are unpredictable. Those who foresee that they are expected to take responsibility for programs in non-literary (transactional) forms of writing, may resent becoming a "service" department; others, assuming that other subject departments would supplement their work in the teaching of writing, are more receptive to the idea.

The question of responsibility - whose it is, and how it can be shared - is the major obstacle in the way of implementing the policy in secondary schools. If the teaching of writing is to be lateralized, we have to secure the agreement of teachers in each individual subject (history, science, social studies etc.) that they have a collective responsibility to inculcate writing skills. Ideally they would recognize the need to set different kinds of assignment between them to extend the students' overall experience in writing, and each would offer guidance and feedback on the details of writing. All this may very well seem something of an imposition on subject teachers, and a quite typical response is: "It's not my job to teach students how to use written English or how to compose essays". Another response is to suggest that the students do in fact get some experience of the writing process in their subject, eg. in note-taking, turning new information into summaries, and writing essays in exams. (Such a contribution to the students' writing development is undoubtedly better than of teachers who assume their responsibility begins and ends with learning the spelling of technical terms in their subject!) But the writing which students currently do in various subjects may not really help to diversify their experience of composing. As Britton found, much of the writing done simply reproduces facts in note or essay form to prove the student's acquaintance with them, and gives little opportunity for real writing development. So much writing is tied to testing (from 40% in year 7 to 61% in year 12), and in a barren classificatory mode, whatever the subject. Even when writing activity is spread over many subjects, it may not stimulate a wider range of writing, or help to students to use writing in more flexible and personally meaningful ways.

Yet to request more opportunities for personal and expressive writing may prove a further stumbling block for reluctant subject teachers. In spite of Nancy Martin's many suggestions on the uses of expressive writing, it may not have much place in the methodology of some secondary school subjects: it may be unhelpful to try to personalize a student's

understanding of geology or ancient history and to spend time documenting it in writing. Because transactional forms of writing are so often demanded of students, it does not seem advisable to prolong their dependence on the expressive. Applebee's analysis of secondary school curriculum in the U.S.A.



Applebee (1981, p 62).

students can in fact exercise their personal writing "voice" while being obliged to present information accurately, or at least plausibly. One should not however assume that this is the way to diversify students' writing in all subjects - again we should be wary of trying to better the situation by a single formula.

What is still needed is a co-ordinating authority (a writing co-ordinator) in each school, a person who would liaise with all subject teachers and try to ensure that students do obtain a diversity of writing experience in their various subjects. It might mean that some subject teachers are encouraged to develop a particular type of writing, one particularly appropriate for their subject, while the writing practised in other subjects is different but complementary. Implemented through such a person, the school's writing program could be properly lateralized; and with the program co-ordinated from year to year, the students would also be assured of longitudinal development of their writing skills.

At the tertiary level

Our notions about writing-across-the-curriculum will of necessity undergo a slight sea-change in the transition from the secondary to tertiary scene, because there is no common curriculum for all students at this level. Unlike American universities, Australian ones do not oblige their students to take a general writing course at the beginning of their studies, in which at least

common denominator writing skills can be taught. But our aim is still that writing should be used in teaching and learning in as many disciplines as possible, so that wherever students specialize, they will get training and guidance in writing.

Using writing as a means of teaching and learning is now a much more widely accepted idea in Australian universities than it was twenty years ago. It is to be seen in the now much heavier emphasis on on-course assessment, and in the mid-term assignments which are carefully commented on to explain the grades given to them. The teaching potential of such assignments is recognized, and very few courses are now assessed purely by exams. This shift towards continuous assessment means that students get some feedback on their writing from most courses, feedback which at its best enters into dialogue with students over the arguments and substance they offer, as well as the effectiveness of their writing about it all. University assignments require quite a range of transactional writing from students, from informative to persuasive writing, which I have discussed in a paper written jointly with Jim Martin (1985). Students who select subjects from the sciences as well as social sciences and humanities certainly get experience of the full range of writing. (See my Strategies for Student Writers (1985) on this.)

The tertiary situation is however less than ideal in that it does not really guarantee the student systematic guidance on matters of writing. The commentary of any staff member on an assignment is made according to his/her own lights, and is quite variable in both quantity and quality, from my observations on the essays brought to me for help in the context of our university's writing courses. Students certainly don't get regular comments on the adequacy of their writing itself, or advice as to how to write a better essay next time. The comments more typically concern the content of their writing, and particular arguments or the use of sources, ie. on how well the essay satisfies the demands of its particular subject. Comments on writing are much less frequent, and tend to highlight the more mechanical aspects of writing (eg. spelling, correct grammar and punctuation) which can be seen in isolation from content. Those aspects which are more fully integrated with content (eg. the overall structure, the logical relations between statements) are less often discussed. So such comments as are made are not geared towards writing development. Rather worse, they seem to trivialize writing skills as mere mechanics, as if the mastery of spelling and punctuation are all it takes to communicate well. Some staff indeed believe that the students should have already acquired all the necessary writing skills at school, and are rather unsympathetic to arguments about longitudinal development of writing skills even at the university.

The idea that writing competence is mostly a matter of mastering the mechanics allows academic staff to argue that someone else should see to it. ("It's not my business, as a chemist/economist/philosopher...") But just who else is less

than obvious, for at most British and Australian universities there is no central body to take responsibility for improving students' writing. (It is different of course in the U.S.A., where most universities offer regular courses in writing, taught by seconded or special staff.) In Australia such facilities are rare. A few small-scale courses are conducted by student counselling units, or in association with particular faculties with a high proportion of second-language students. Hardly any have a comprehensive set of courses for students across the whole university: until recently it was only Macquarie, though La Trobe University is also developing its facilities in this area. Here at least there is scope for teaching all aspects of writing, to complement whatever staff members may be willing to do for their students.

In spite of the rather uneven engagement of academic staff in the business of advising their students about their writing, it still seems better that they should be involved. Successful writing in any discipline or subject is not simply a matter of communicating ideas according to common writing conventions. At tertiary level, the effectiveness and value of a piece of writing will ultimately depend on the type of thinking and scholarly practices which it represents. Academic practices vary of course from discipline to discipline - some, notably among the sciences, depending much more on empirical observation, and others, especially among the contemporary social sciences and humanities, on theoretical and thematic interpretation. Different styles of writing correspond to these different academic approaches, and "good writing" for the practising scientist probably distinguishes itself by its attentiveness to detail, while that of the humanist, by its interpretive consistency. Within disciplines, differences of this kind also emerge, because of staff adherence to different schools of inquiry. Among linguists, for example, there are those whose work is characterized by empirical practices, and their writing, by its precision and factuality. Other linguists use an interpretive approach to their subject matter, and the strength of their writing is its ability to project a consistent model of language. Depending on which theoretical school you belong to, you are likely to find one kind of writing more valuable than the other, and orient students in that direction. So long as it is clear to students how academic writing reflects a particular academic persuasion, they can learn from the exposure to any. It should indeed give them deeper insights into the values of the discipline, and the reasons for divergence among staff in the same department.

This disciplinary aspect of writing assumes greater and greater importance as students come to specialize. It might seem to mark the end of lateralization of their writing experience, though I think it should rather be seen as an intensification of it within their chosen discipline, enabling them to understand better what practitioners of the discipline are doing with their writing - and how to do it themselves. As graduates and

researchers they must be competent professional writers, and the university is increasingly being seen in Australia as "accountable" to the community in this aspect of the training of students. In U.S.A., where the notion of accountability is more widely recognized, advanced teaching in disciplinary writing is being institutionalized on many campuses, as well as courses in technical writing, designed to equip students to communicate specialized subject matter to a variety of audiences. In both types of teaching, it is practitioners of the discipline who can speak with most authority and understanding of the real contexts of writing, within the academic world, and outside it. So in what seem the most promising American programs (in Michigan and California, in Maryland and Texas) professionals and academics act as the primary instructors, rather than general writing teachers.

By emphasizing the disciplinary and pre-professional aspects of writing at the tertiary level, we have some chance of modifying the idea among academic staff that writing is a trivial pursuit or something peripheral to the work of the discipline. In fact, writing virtually is the work of the discipline at this level. As one scientist wryly put it: "Science only begins when the worker has recorded his results in terms intelligible to at least one other person (who is) qualified to dispute them". Staff can use selected readings to simultaneously teach the subject and teach writing, drawing attention to the way that findings have been presented and arguments constructed, and to the working principles by which they would assess them. All such discussion forms the most relevant guidance which tertiary students can get for their own writing.

Initiatives in writing-across-the-curriculum in N.S.W.

Action to implement the writing-across-the-curriculum policy in schools has been spearheaded by a special unit within the New South Wales Department of Education, known as the K-12 Writing Project. It is staffed with a group of teachers seconded from both primary and secondary schools, in the hope that they can devise programs and ways of teaching writing which can continue throughout a child's schooling, so that writing practices begun in the early years are consolidated and developed continuously. But because the primary and secondary curricula are under separate management, the approaches to teachers at those levels are rather different.

1) Primary

The approach to primary teachers is quite straightforward and direct because there is, as already mentioned, a co-ordinated language syllabus which all teachers work with. They enjoy a good deal of freedom as to how they integrate writing into the school day, and some enterprising ones have been incorporating expressive writing into the work in history or social studies.

It is clear that primary age children get a lot of pleasure from, say, identifying with their counterparts in Australia's pioneer days, and recording it as imaginative reading for others in the class. The work is like some of that suggested by Nancy Martin for secondary schools.

In many schools the most obvious development in teaching writing is an emphasis on writing as a process and on the use of the conferencing approach to support children through all phases of composing. In spite of the practical problems with larger classes, the "process" approach seems to generate a lot of enthusiasm, and has the support of the local primary teachers' journal. It has undoubtedly made teachers more aware of the steps which precede a finished written product, and helped them to teach writing more systematically.

The help of parents is also being solicited via pamphlets, in encouraging children to write for non-scholastic purposes at home. Letters to relatives give the children an alternative audience, and even briefer writing tasks, like compiling shopping lists or taking telephone messages, are seen as useful and purposeful forms of writing for a child to practise. The home experience of writing can thus extend the child's horizons on writing, and it seems another productive initiative.

2) Secondary

Those in the K-12 Writing Project working at the secondary level are grappling with the problems of the decentralized nature of secondary school studies, and looking for ways of influencing the forty-five separate syllabus boards which regulate individual subjects for years 7 to 10 (and the equally large number governing the so-called "Senior studies" in years 11 and 12). Representatives from these boards have been invited to several workshops during the last eighteen months, in the hope of arousing interest in the idea of writing-across-the-curriculum, and in order to discover from subject teachers themselves, what kinds of writing are used in their classes, and how writing activities and instruction can be most readily integrated with their work. The project staff are very conscious of the need to work by consensus, and to respect the problems which subject teachers envisage in teaching writing amid their other work. Bitter experience has shown that the Department cannot impose a language "from the top", and that support must be cultivated at all levels in the teaching hierarchy.

Beyond the need to enlist the support of individual subject teachers, there is the problem of co-ordinating writing activities across the curriculum in individual schools, within both the state and private systems. Special co-ordinating personnel are really needed, alongside the already recognized "resource" staff attached to most larger schools. Until writing co-ordinators become part of the regular establishment, initiatives will continue to depend on the energies of particular teachers, and on their willingness to spend time thinking about

the collective needs of students at their school. At one local private school, two members of staff have worked to put together a set of audio-visual materials on writing in various subjects, for students to use in their own time. It seems an admirable enterprise, and there there is help for students whether or not their subject teachers are disposed to find time for writing instruction.

3) Tertiary

Within my own university, some initiatives in connection with the teaching of writing have been taken by a voluntary body known as the Working Party on Writing Standards. The name sounds rather formidable, but the group consists of academics from several disciplines, who share an interest in helping students to write better. They have some power to recommend what they consider helpful measures to the University Senate (the university's academic governing body), and they try to canvass any such measures among their colleagues before they do.

The group has had some success in inducing staff to use a screening exercise in the early weeks of a first year course, as a means of discovering which of the new students really need help with their writing. The screening exercise is simply any piece of writing of 500 words or more which has a natural place in the course. Academic staff set it for their own purposes, but incidentally use it to identify students "at risk" over their writing. They then refer students to one of the several writing courses available at Macquarie, using a letter of referral also devised by the Working Party on Writing Standards. Because the screening exercise is fully integrated with course work, and the letter of referral takes no effort to sign, the system seems to be accepted; and it serves to bring students with general writing problems to the university's writing skills offerings.

Another proposal by the Working Party on Writing Standards did not, to my regret, obtain the same acceptance across the university. This time we proposed that among the existing courses taught anywhere at third year level, there should be a network of ones designated by the letter W (W courses), in which special attention would be paid to academic writing in that subject. There was no suggestion that all third year teachers would want to do this - just those with a ready interest, who found it compatible with the normal course work. But the very possibility that some staff might do it while other did not, seemed to raise anxiety in many. The reasons given for this anxiety were strangely mixed. Some thought that the writing emphasis would draw students in unmanageable numbers, others, that it would make them stay away in droves. The worry over class sizes seemed to go back to fears about the balance of power associated with them. Another common response was to plead lack of resources: "I would, but I need more teaching assistance" - using the proposal as a lever to exert pressure for staffing increases. Thus the reactions to the proposal were disappointingly political, and not much related to the inherent

educational issues. The proposal has for the time being been shelved.

Conclusion

It is on this last point that I would draw my overall conclusions to the issues raised in this paper. Amid all our efforts to establish the teaching of writing across the curriculum, pedagogical matters can easily be overshadowed by matters of educational politics. Questions of educational organization and management and responsibility have kept coming up in our discussion, and they must be realistically faced. But we must not allow the general discussion of the policy to be diverted away from the pedagogical advantages which it offers and which justify its implementation. The advantages are exactly those discussed as underlying principles at the start of this paper. The strength of the second principle depends to some extent on further research into academic discourse and the structure of writing in different disciplines, which would facilitate the teaching of writing. But in the meantime we can claim the full value of the first principle, and encourage all teachers to exploit the learning potential of writing in their subject.

References

- Applebee, Arthur N. (1981) Writing in the Secondary School Urbana, Ill., National Council of the Teachers of English.
- Britton, James, T. Burgess, N. Martin, A. Mcleod, H. Rosen (1975) The Development of Writing Abilities 11-18 London, Macmillan.
- Bullock, Sir Alan (1975) A Language for Life, Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Teaching of Language in Schools. London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Emig, Janet (1977) "Writing as a mode of learning" College Composition and Communication, 28.
- Knoblauch, Cy and Lil Brannon (1983) "Writing as learning through the curriculum" College English, 45 nr.5.
- Martin, Jim (ms) Factual writing: exploring and challenging social reality Course booklet for ECS806 Sociocultural Aspects of Language and Education, Deakin University, Vic.
- Martin, Jim and P. Peters (1985) "On the analysis of exposition" in R. Hasan ed. Discourse on Discourse, Report on the Macquarie Discourse Analysis Workshop, Monograph Series, Applied Linguistics Association of Australia.
- Martin, Nancy, P. D'Arcy, B. Newton, R. Parker (1976) Writing and Learning across the Curriculum 11-16 London, Schools Council Publications.
- Odell, Lee (1980) "The process of writing and the process of learning" College Composition and Communication, 31.
- Peters, Pam (1985) Strategies for Student Writers Brisbane, Qld., John Wiley.